

**KAREN FOLEY:** Welcome back to the STEM Showcase. Well, in this session, we're going to talk about how to get involved as an OU student, opportunities and ways in which you can volunteer. We talk a lot about the value of volunteering in our previous session with the Careers and Employability Services. But now I am joined by Katie Macfarlane and Ellie Milnes-Smith.

Katie is our faculty representative for STEM. So she's the voice of all STEM students, including a wide range of decision-making bodies. And Ellie is the volunteering and representation officer at the OU Students Association supporting a really diverse range of students who volunteer.

But also, Ellie works very closely with academic representatives, such as Katie. So, Katie, I wonder if we might start with you. Can you fill people in who may not know what the Students Association is?

**KATIE** We're the officially recognised voice of OU students both within the Open University and externally. I'm the voice  
**MACFARLANE:** of the students within the STEM faculty.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Brilliant, thank you, Katie. And, Ellie, what might you add to that from your perspective in terms of who the Students Association are? You support people like Katie.

**ELLIE MILNES-** I do. So as well as being the voice of OU students, we're also really the community of OU students. And the  
**SMITH:** Students Association is a fantastic organisation. We run tonnes of community-based events and lots of support services for students. So we're here to make sure that the OU is not just a place of learning, it's also a community for students.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And typically, Katie, at brick-and-mortar universities, students might join their student association. But at the OU, it's a bit different, isn't it?

**KATIE** Yes, it is. You're actually all already members. As soon as you start studying with the university, you're  
**MACFARLANE:** automatically members of the Students Association.

**KAREN FOLEY:** OK, brilliant. Well, that's really good for everyone to know. And we've got links to the website as well if you would like to find out more about the range of things that are happening within the Students Association. But let's take a look at volunteering and getting involved. So, Ellie, what are the opportunities that might be available for people who are interested in volunteering some of their time?

**ELLIE MILNES-** So one of the fantastic things, actually, about my role is that I get to support a community of over 450 roles at  
**SMITH:** present, even more when we go back to face to face and have things like graduation. There really are opportunities that can suit everyone. Our wonderful community volunteers host things like meetups, get-togethers, bingo nights, all kinds of wonderful things. And again, we hope we'll be going back to face-to-face and local meet-ups at some point. We've got our wonderful support volunteers, so our peer supporters who look after their fellow students, our library study volunteers who support the academic work of students in secure environments.

We have a couple of new, fantastic flexible roles. So one of our new projects this year are micro volunteers. And that's a really brilliant way of getting involved as and when you have time, so just giving your time in bite-size chunks, making a difference whether that's 5 or 10 minutes at a time.

And another flexible role we have, actually, are student experience links. And this is a role we're recruiting for right now. It's a flexible role. And it's a way of supporting academic reps, like Katie, feeding back from the student body, drawing on your lived experiences as a student, feeding those into representation and really making a difference on students' behalf. And I'll let Katie talk a bit about academic reps because she's best placed for that.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Brilliant, thank you, Ellie. Well, Katie, can you fill us in about the role of being an academic rep?

**KATIE** We've got different types of academic reps. Some of them are elected, like myself. And we also have many  
**MACFARLANE:** committee reps who would often serve on the Board of Studies, for example. And they are appointed.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And what are some of the things that you might get to do as a faculty rep in some of these Boards of Studies settings?

**KATIE** As a faculty rep, I'm on a lot of internal committee groups and working groups. For example, the Senate  
**MACFARLANE:** Reference Group and the STEM Teaching Committee, which will feed into shaping qualifications, strategy. I also work on a few working groups at the moment. I'm working on one that's looking at the assessment handbook and rewriting it so that it's a lot easier to understand and find the information that you're looking for. And I also work with the reps on the Board of Studies to feed what they are saying further up.

And I support students with queries that they may have. I run events like the monthly STEM Drop-Ins. And I'm working on running events for PhD students to present their research to the undergrad students, which have been popular so far. I've also been involved in external things; a parliamentary roundtable recently with the Scottish Affairs Committee where we were relaying information from the students on the impact of COVID. And that was with student reps from universities all over Scotland.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Gosh, so lots of things to do. And it sounds quite full on, Katie. I mean, you're involved in all of these working groups and things. What do you get out of it? And how do you feel rewarded for this volunteering you're doing?

**KATIE** I like being part of the volunteer community. It's really supportive. And also, knowing that I'm making a difference  
**MACFARLANE:** to the student experience is fantastic. I really enjoy it.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Absolutely, I think one of those things with volunteering is that contribution and making a difference. What are some of the things that you've been able to feed back? Ellie was talking about the ways in which other students might feed you areas of information that may be important. And something like the assessment handbook is such a fundamentally important part of the ways that students interact. How have you been involved in shaping some of those experiences of students and the student voice into actually implementing change within the university?

**KATIE** Just listening to what they say. Making sure I'm keeping an eye out on the spaces that students are in, listening  
**MACFARLANE:** to what they say and bringing it forward when I'm in the working groups.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So it's constantly about raising those concerns in the appropriate places that's really important.

**KATIE** Yeah.

**MACFARLANE:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** And also, I mean, clubs are a great way for people to get involved also in a different thing. Tyler is a member of the Biology Club. She says it's a really great club with lots of community there. What do you meet-ups like? What's the community vibe of some of the drop-ins that you hold?

**KATIE** I'll forward with that one over to Ellie because she's got-- mine's is fairly limited. But Ellie knows more.

**MACFARLANE:**

**ELLIE MILNES-SMITH:** Yeah, no, one of the fantastic things, actually, is we have so many clubs and societies. So, Tyler, yeah, great Biology Club. We have an award-winning space club which is pretty new. Everything all the way to bell ringers.

So we have lots of community meet-ups. We've got a few this week, actually. And clubs are such a fantastic way of meeting students who are passionate about the same things as you.

Some of these clubs, they're tiny. We're maybe talking about 10, 20 members. Some of them, hundreds, maybe even thousands.

So really, there is everything for you in terms of, what do you enjoy? And that's the wonderful thing about OU students as a community, it's so diverse. Everyone likes different things. And there is always something out there for you.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Brilliant, that's absolutely fantastic. Now we're going to talk about some of the stuff that you've got coming up in terms of the pipeline. But Laura loves the merch. And one of the things-- I know Nicola has been putting the links in the chat-- that we all love about the OU Students Association is the shop, where you can buy lots of OU-related things.

Laura has got both the zipped and the pull-on hoodies. And I know there's been quite a lot of talk about how lovely they are and how well they wash, which is always a very important consideration by anybody hoodie in my book. So there's lots of love for that.

And also, of course, as an OU student, you can get a TOTUM card that gives you discounts to many other things. It's always great to be able to go into a shop and say, do you offer a student discount, I find. So there's lots of stuff there as well. But tell us what's coming up, Ellie. What's happening in terms of freshers that you've got lined up for the people who are starting in October?

**ELLIE MILNES-SMITH:** Yeah. Well, at the moment, so this week, we've actually got some lovely events. Tomorrow, 6:00 till 7:00, we have a community drop-in online. So any OU student is welcome. Just come along, have a chat.

There's a coffee and cake session on Saturday. I think that's 10:00 till 11:00. You will have to bring your own coffee and cake, I'm afraid. We can't post that to you or shove it down the ethernet cable as much as we might like to. So lots of events coming up. And you can check out our website, [OUStudents.com/Events](http://OUStudents.com/Events).

But, yes, we also run Freshers' Week. And it's not just open to freshers, it's open to every OU student. No matter how long you've been with us, come along.

We run lots of events. There are lots of meet-ups. So if you want to meet students in your local area, if you want to find out more about our services, so peer support, if you want to find out more about volunteering and the roles we have open or even your student leadership team and what they're getting up to, we have a really, really packed Freshers' Week schedule. So do check out our website, [OUStudents.com](http://OUStudents.com) a bit closer to the time.

And I am just going to add one more plug to the shop because, yes, we have fantastic merchandise, which normally we do sell at graduations. But you can also shop knowing that the profits for that are going towards the OU Students Educational Trust, which is a charity to support OU students in financial hardship. So, yes, the hoodies wash well. And you're doing a good thing.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And Laura says that she's noticed that when she wears her hoodie, she gets lots of smiles from strangers who are presumably OU students as well. It's amazing how many people have a connection to the OU through either something that they've studied or somebody that they know. And Janice recommends the OU Make Club on Facebook for crafty folks. So that's a really good tip. Thank you for sharing that, Janice. Katie, anything you'd like to share about Student Voice Week?

**KATIE** Yeah, we've got Student Voice Week coming up. That's where you can get involved and make sure that you have  
**MACFARLANE:** your voice heard with the university. Sooner than that, though, we've got the Results Day Drop-In coming up on the 20th of July at 6:00 PM. And your faculty reps will all be there to help you answer any questions you might have about your results, to celebrate with you or commiserate.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Brilliant. Well, thank you, Katie and Ellie. That's been absolutely fantastic. Lots of different options there for people to get involved.

And, Nicola, thank you so much for putting all of those links in the chat. But if you are watching on catch up, you can just Google "OU Students Association," and you'll get directed to the shop and all of the opportunities that are there. They also have a calendar event so you can find out what's happening and also ways to get involved in volunteering opportunities.

Right, we're now going to have a short video break. We're going to show you another of our campus tours. This time we're going to take a look at Walton Hall.

And then we will be back. I know a lot of you have been waiting for this session. We're going to talk about maths; getting to know the new maths and its learning curriculum. So this will be particularly relevant for anyone who is interested in teaching, in particular teaching mathematics, whether it's to students in primary school or your own student at home. So we'll be back in just a few minutes after this break. See you then.

[MUSIC PLAYING]